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*The definition of what drought is and what drought is not has profound implications for the environment and all segments of society, yet it may be different for each. Many attempts have been made to develop a comprehensive and meaningful definition. A generic definition provides a starting point: "Drought is a persistent and abnormal moisture deficiency having adverse impacts on vegetation, animals, or people."*

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Farmers who do not have irrigation systems, for example, take a risk when they plant crops, assuming that there will be enough rain throughout the growing season to produce a successful harvest. For the most part, the risk is based on how often there has been enough rain in the past. Long-term predictions of precipitation are still too unreliable to reduce that risk significantly.

At our hearings across the country, we were told of several gaps among existing programs and the needs of farmers and ranchers who do not rely on irrigation:

- ☀ Farmers and ranchers may lack information about local climate and drought conditions and predictions. Many also lack basic soil information; a soil survey remains to be completed for approximately 10% of the country. These deficiencies can limit a farmer's or rancher's ability to make timely decisions on the types of crops to plant or whether to reduce stocking rates on the range.
- ☀ Many farmers and ranchers do not have access to available information and other resources to develop and implement a water conservation/drought plan. Less than 10% of farmers and ranchers are receiving technical assistance to help them develop and implement such plans, and an even smaller number are receiving cost-share assistance for these plans.
- ☀ Federal crop insurance covers only the "primary" crops grown and does not extend to other crops or to livestock. We learned that during drought the price of transporting feed after stored supplies are used up is prohibitive in many cases, as is the price of transporting water to livestock where ponds have gone dry.

We heard too that when drought affects the incomes of farmers and ranchers and the owners of water-dependent businesses, it also affects the incomes of nearby local businesses. Such economic impacts may extend further to nearby cities.